TWO SERMONS

PREACHED AT

THE CHAPEL ROYAL,

ST. JAMES's.

By BEILBY PORTEUS, D.D.
RECTOR OF LAMBETH,
AND
CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY.

THE SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:
Printed by H. HUGHS, near Lincoln's-Inn-Fields:
And Sold by T. PAYNE, at the Mews-Gate; and
J. and T. MERRILL, at Cambridge.

M.DCC.LXXII.

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TO THE

QUEEN,

2 Tim. iii. 4.

THESE SERMONS ARE,

WITH ALL POSSIBLE RESPECT AND HUMILITY,

INSCRIBED,

BY HER MAJESTY's

MOST OBEDIENT,

MOST FAITHFUL,

AND MOST DUTIFUL

SERVANT,

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2 TIM. iii. 4.

LOVERS OF PLEASURES MORE THAN LOVERS OF GOD.

TO what period of time, and to what particular persons, the ſacred writer here alludes, it is neither eaſy nor material to determine. But there is a queſtion which it is very material, and I doubt but too eaſy, for moſt of us to anſwer, whether the deſcription in the text may not be juſtly applied to ourſelves? In whatever ſenſe we take the word PLEASURES, whether as denoting thoſe which are in themſelves criminal, or thoſe which only become ſo by exceſs and abuſe; it is ſurely doing us no injury to ſay, that we LOVE THEM MORE THAN GOD. At preſent I ſhall confine myſelf to that ſort of pleaſures, which are uſually ſtiled innocent; and in a certain degree, and under proper reſtrictions undoubtedly are ſo; I mean the gayeties and amuſements of life. If we are not lovers of *theſe* pleaſures more than lovers of God; if our piety is greater than our diſſipation, it muſt be great indeed. If we

ſerved our Maker with half that zeal, half that alacrity and perſeverance, with which we purſue our amuſements, we ſhould be the moſt pious nation this day upon earth. But how far this is from being the caſe is but too apparent. It is not the LIVING GOD, it is PLEASURE that we worſhip. To this we are idolaters; to this we ſacrifice our time, our talents, our fortunes, our health, and too often our innocence and peace of mind. In our haſte to enjoy this life, we forget that there is another; we live (as the Apoſtle expreſſes it) WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD[a], and our endleſs engagements not only exclude all love but all thought of him. However carefully right principles of religion may have been originally planted in our breaſts, they have no room to grow up. They are choked with the pleaſures of this world, and bring no fruit to perfection. Invention ſeems to have been tortured to find out new ways of conſuming time, and of being uſeleſsly employed. And there has appear'd ſo wonderful an ingenuity in this reſpect, that it ſeems almoſt impoſſible for the wit of man to invent, or the life of man to admit, any further additions to this kind of luxury. There are thouſands, even of thoſe who would take it very ill to be called vicious, who yet from the time of their riſing in the morning to the time of their going to reſt at night, never once beſtow a ſingle thought upon

[a] Eph. ii. 12.

eternity;

eternity; nor, whilſt they riot in the bleſſings of Providence, vouchſafe to caſt one devout look up to the gracious author of them, in whom THEY LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE THEIR BEING [a].

Many, I know, would perſuade themſelves and others, that there can be no harm where there is no actual vice; and that provided they ſtep not over the bounds of virtue, they cannot be guilty of an exceſs in pleaſure.

But is it true in the firſt place, that the man of gayety never *does* ſtep over the bounds of virtue? Are all thoſe things which go under the name of amuſements as perfectly innocent as they are generally repreſented to be? Is there not one diverſion at leaſt (as it is called) and one ſo predominant in the higher ranks of life, that it has ſwallowed up almoſt every other, which is big with the moſt fatal miſchief? A diverſion, which far different from the common run of amuſements has no foundation in our natural appetites; no charms to captivate the fancy, or the underſtanding; nothing to make glad the heart of man, to give him a chearful countenance, and refreſh him after the cares and fatigues of duty; but runs counter to reaſon, ſenſe, and nature; defeats all the purpoſes of amuſement; ſinks the ſpirits inſtead of raiſing

[a] Acts xvii. 28.

them; ſours the temper inſtead of improving it: and when it is carried to its utmoſt lengths, takes ſuch entire and abſolute poſſeſſion of the ſoul, as to ſhut out every other concern both for God and Man; extinguiſhes every generous ſentiment; excites the moſt malignant paſſions; provokes to the moſt profane expreſſions; brings diſtreſs, ſometimes ruin, upon its wretched votaries, their families, friends, and dependants; tempts them to uſe unfair, or mean, or oppreſſive methods of retrieving their affairs; and ſometimes to conclude the diſmal ſcene by the laſt fatal act of deſperation. I do not ſay that gaming *always* produces theſe effects; or that it is to all perſons, in all circumſtances, and in all its various degrees, equally pernicious and unlawful. But it has always *a natural tendency* to theſe effects, it always expoſes ourſelves and others to great danger, and can never be ranked amongſt our innocent amuſements. Yet as ſuch it is every day more and more purſued; nay has even appropriated to itſelf the name of *play*—for what reaſon I know not, unleſs to *play* with our lives and fortunes, with happineſs temporal and eternal, be the moſt delectable of all human enjoyments.

But putting this ſtrange unaccountable paſſion out of the queſtion; do not even our moſt allowable diverſions ſometimes end in ſin, though they may not begin with it? Does not an immoderate fondneſs for theſe trivial things, inſenſibly weaken

and corrupt our hearts, and lead us by imperceptible ſteps to a temper of mind, and a courſe of action, eſſentially wrong? The fact is, a ſtate of neutrality in religion, an inſipid mediocrity betwixt vice and virtue, though it is what many would be glad to take up with, is an imaginary ſtate; at leaſt, is very ſeldom, if ever, to be found in a life of gayety and diſſipation. The man who is conſtantly engaged in the amuſements, can ſcarce ever eſcape the pollutions, of the world. In his eager purſuits of pleaſure, he will be ſometimes apt to overſhoot the mark, and to go further than he ought, perhaps than he intended. Even they who are moſt in earneſt about their future welfare; who have taken care to fortify their minds with the firmeſt principles of Religion; who conſtantly endeavour to keep alive their hopes and fears of futurity; to guard with the utmoſt vigilance every avenue of the mind, and ſecure all THE ISSUES OF LIFE[c]; even theſe, I ſay, are ſometimes unable, with all their caution and circumſpection to prevent ſurprize; with all their ſtrength and reſolution to withſtand the violence of headſtrong paſſions and deſires; which often burſt through all reſtraints, and beat down all the barriers that reaſon and religion had been a long time raiſing up againſt them. What then muſt be the caſe when all the impreſſions of religion are by the continual attrition of diverſions worn out, and effaced; when the mind is ſtript of

[c] Proverbs iv. 23.

all

all prudential caution; no guard left upon the imagination; no check upon the paſſions; the natural ſpring and vigour of the ſoul impaired, and no ſupernatural aid to ſtrengthen and ſupport it? What elſe can be expected, but that we ſhould fall an eaſy prey to the weakeſt invader, and yield ourſelves up to the ſlighteſt temptation? WHEN THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT COMETH, HE FINDS EVERY THING WITHIN PREPARED FOR HIS RECEPTION, EMPTY, SWEPT AND GARNISHED; AND HE TAKETH WITH HIM SEVEN OTHER SPIRITS MORE WICKED THAN HIMSELF; AND THEY ENTER IN, AND DWELL THERE, AND THE LAST STATE OF THAT MAN IS WORSE THAN THE FIRST[d]; he begins in gayety, and ends in vice.

Let us however take this queſtion up on the moſt favourable grounds: Let us allow it poſſible for you to run round for ever in the circle of gayety, without ever once ſtriking into the paths of vice. Is this do you think ſufficient for ſalvation? If your amuſements as effectually choke the good ſeed as the rankeſt weeds of vice, can you with any propriety call them innocent? Do you imagine that God, who is a JEALOUS GOD[e], will bear to be ſupplanted in your affections by every trifle; or that he will be content with your not taking up arms againſt him, though you do him not one ſingle piece of acceptable ſervice? The utmoſt you can plead, is a kind of

[d] Matth. xii. 44, 45. [e] Exod. xx. 5.

negative

negative merit, the merit of doing neither good nor harm; and what reception that is likely to meet with, you may judge from the anſwer given to the unprofitable ſervant who produced his talent wrapped up in a napkin, undiminiſhed indeed but unimproved: O THOU WICKED SERVANT, WHEREFORE GAVEST THOU NOT MY MONEY INTO THE BANK, THAT AT MY COMING I MIGHT HAVE REQUIRED MINE OWN WITH USURY[t]? It is not enough merely to abſtain from groſs crimes. It is not enough to enjoy yourſelves in an indolent harmleſs tranquillity; to divide matters ſo nicely as to avoid equally the inconveniences of vice, and the fatigues of virtue; to praiſe religion in words, to love it perhaps in ſpeculation, but to leave the trouble of practiſing it to others. This languor and inactivity is a kind of lethargy in the ſoul, which renders it utterly inſenſible to the life and ſpirit of religion. Indifference in any good cauſe is blameable. In religion, in the Chriſtian religion, it is inſupportable. It does violence to the firſt and fundamental principle of that religion. THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD, WITH ALL THY HEART, WITH ALL THY SOUL, WITH ALL THY MIND, AND WITH ALL THY STRENGTH[s]. Go now and let your whole heart and ſoul, and mind, and ſtrength, be engaged in purſuing your amuſe-

[t] Luke xix. 23. [s] Mark xii. 30.

ments,

ments, and promoting your pleasures, and then lay claim to the rewards of Christianity.

Happy will it be for you, if you can escape its punishments. The Gospel, I am sure, gives you no grounds to suppose that you shall. Though you bear NO EVIL FRUIT, yet if you bear no GOOD you are involved in the sentence of the fig-tree, CUT IT DOWN, WHY CUMBERETH IT THE GROUND [k]? To do nothing is in many cases to do a positive wrong, and as such requires a positive punishment. To stand neuter in dangerous commotions of the state, the great Athenian lawgiver declared to be a crime *against* the state; and in like manner the great Christian lawgiver declares; HE THAT IS NOT WITH ME, IS AGAINST ME, AND HE THAT GATHERETH NOT WITH ME, SCATTERETH ABROAD [l].

Christianity is throughout an *active* religion; it consists not only in ABSTAINING FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL [m]; but IN BEING READY TO EVERY GOOD WORK [n]; and if we stop short at the first, we leave the better half of our business undone. Christ himself WENT ABOUT continually DOING GOOD [o]; and he has prescribed a variety of positive and practical duties to his disciples, as the condition of their salvation;

[k] Luke xiii. 7. [l] Matth. xii. 30. [m] 1 Thess. v. 22.
[n] Tit. iii. 1. [o] Acts x. 38.

and

and preſſed the performance of theſe duties upon them, with an earneſtneſs and a force of expreſſion, that may well alarm the thoughtleſs and the gay, and make them reflect on the extreme danger of their ſituation. With regard to God we are commanded TO BELIEVE IN HIM, TO FEAR HIM, TO LOVE HIM, TO WORSHIP HIM, TO GIVE HIM THANKS ALWAYS, TO PRAY WITHOUT CEASING, AND WATCH THEREUNTO WITH ALL PERSEVERANCE. With regard to our neighbour, we are TO DO GOOD UNTO ALL MEN, TO BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS, TO BE KIND AND TENDER HEARTED, TO FEED THE HUNGRY, TO CLOATH THE NAKED, TO REMEMBER THEM THAT ARE IN BONDS, TO MINISTER TO THE SICK, TO VISIT THE FATHERLESS AND WIDOWS IN THEIR AFFLICTION. With regard to ourſelves we are enjoined TO BE TEMPERATE IN ALL THINGS, TO KEEP UNDER OUR BODIES, AND BRING THEM INTO SUBJECTION, TO SET OUR AFFECTIONS ON THINGS ABOVE, TO WATCH AND PRAY LEST WE ENTER INTO TEMPTATION, TO WORK OUT OUR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING, TO USE ALL DILIGENCE TO MAKE OUR CALLING AND ELECTION SURE [a]. Such and ſo various are the duties preſſed upon us in every page of the ſcriptures. And is this now a religion to be trifled with? Is it not enough to employ every moment we can ſpare from the indiſpenſable duties of our ſtation, and the neceſſary refreſhments of Nature;

[a] See the New Teſtament, throughout.

and how then can it be consistent with that incessant hurry and dissipation, which, intent only on providing a succession of worthless amusements and ignoble gratifications, overlooks every precept of reason and revelation; and supposes that the whole business of life is not to employ time usefully, but to consume it insignificantly? Can these men seriously imagine that they are all this time WORKING OUT THEIR SALVATION, that they are PRESSING FORWARDS TOWARDS THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE OF THEIR HIGH CALLING [a], that they are every day drawing nearer and nearer to immortal happiness, and that they shall share the crown of glory with them who HAVE BORN THE BURTHEN AND HEAT OF THE DAY [b]? Is eternal life so very small an object, so extremely cheap a purchase, as to require not the least pains to obtain it? Or is the situation of the rich man represented in scripture to be so perfectly safe and secure, that whilst the rest of mankind are enduring afflictions, struggling with difficulties, subduing their passions, and fighting the good fight with patience; he, and he only, may neglect all these precautions, may give up his whole time and thoughts to dress and magnificence, and diversion, and good cheer; may center his whole care in his own dear person, and make it his sole study to gratify every wish of his heart; may leave his salvation to take care of itself, and as if he had obtained a promise of Heaven in reversion,

[a] Phil. iii. 14. [b] Matth. xx. 12.

think

think of nothing but present felicity; and say within himself, SOUL, THOU HAST MUCH GOODS LAID UP FOR MANY YEARS, TAKE THINE EASE, EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY[a]? BE NOT DECEIVED[b]: This is not virtue, this is not religion, this is not Christianity. It is, on the contrary, that very temper of mind, that indolent, soft, luxurious, dream of the soul, for which the rich man in the Gospel was condemned TO LIFT UP HIS EYES IN TORMENTS[c]; and let those who dread his punishment, be warned by his example.

It is then a fatal mistake to suppose, that a life of continual gayety and dissipation, because it is not marked with any notorious crimes, because it does not shock our consciences with palpable guilt, is therefore perfectly innocent. You have by this time seen, I hope, that it is far from being so. You have seen that it naturally leads to, and frequently terminates in, actual vice; that at the least it so totally unmans and enfeebles the soul, as to render it unfit for the reception of religious truths, incapable of exerting its nobler powers, unable to struggle through the common difficulties, or support the common afflictions, of life; and leaves neither time nor inclination, nor ability, to perform the most important duties of a man, a social being, and a Christian.

[a] Luke xii. 19. [b] 1 Cor. vi. 9. [c] Luke xvi. 23.

The truth is, though diverſions may ſerve very well to quicken a palled appetite, they are much too poignant and high-ſeaſon'd to be the conſtant food and nouriſhment of the ſoul. They not only deſtroy our reliſh for the more plain and ſimple fare of ſobriety and virtue, but lay a foundation for the worſt diſeaſes; and though they do not ſo inſtantly kill as the deadly poiſon of vice, yet with a gradual and a fatal certainty, they undermine the vital parts, and ſap the conſtitution.

Beware then of an error, which is the more dangerous, becauſe it is not always perceived, or at leaſt acknowledged, to *be* an error. And ſuch of you, more eſpecially, as are juſt ſetting out in life, full of thoſe high ſpirits and gay imaginations which youth, and rank, and affluence, naturally inſpire; beware of giving way to that feveriſh thirſt of pleaſure, to that frivolous turn of mind and levity of conduct, which will render all your great advantages uſeleſs, and totally defeat every grand purpoſe of your creation. Do not imagine that you were born to pleaſe yourſelves only. Do not entertain that falſe, that deſtructive notion, that your wealth and time are all your own; that you may diſpoſe of them exactly as you think fit; may laviſh the whole of them on your own pleaſures and amuſements, without being accountable to any one for the application of them.

There

There *is* one moſt aſſuredly who may, and who has declared that he will, call you to an account, for the uſe of that leiſure and thoſe riches, which he beſtowed upon you for far other purpoſes than that mean ignoble one of meer ſelfiſh gratification. There are duties of the laſt importance owing to your families, your friends, your country, your fellow-creatures, your Creator, which you are bound under the moſt ſacred ties to perform; and whatever calls off your attention from theſe, does from that moment ceaſe to be innocent. Here then is the preciſe point at which you ought to ſtop. You may be LOVERS OF PLEASURE; it is natural, it is reaſonable, for you to be ſo; but you muſt not be LOVERS OF PLEASURE, MORE THAN LOVERS OF GOD. This is the true line that ſeparates *harmleſs gayety* from *criminal diſſipation*. It is a line drawn by the hand of God himſelf, and he will never ſuffer it to be paſſed with impunity. HE claims on the juſteſt grounds the firſt places in your hearts. His laws and precepts are to be the firſt object of your regard. And be aſſured that by ſuffering them to be ſo, you will be no loſers even in preſent felicity. It is a truth demonſtrable by reaſon, and confirmed by invariable experience, that a perpetual round of faſhionable gayety, is not the road to real ſubſtantial happineſs. Aſk thoſe who have tried it, and they will all (if they are honeſt) with one voice declare, that it is not. It is indeed in the very nature of things impoſſible

that

that it ſhould be ſo. This world is not calculated to afford, the human mind is not formed to bear, a conſtant ſucceſſion of new and exquiſite delights. To aim therefore at uninterrupted unbounded gayety, to make pleaſure ſo neceſſary to your exiſtence, that you cannot ſubſiſt one moment without it, is to convert every thing that is not abſolute pleaſure into abſolute pain, and to lay the foundation of certain miſery. Diverſions are of too thin and unſubſtantial a nature to fill the whole capacity of a rational mind, or to ſatisfy the cravings of a ſoul formed for immortality. They muſt, they do, tire and diſguſt; you ſee it every day; you ſee men flying from one amuſement to another; affecting to be happy, yet feeling themſelves miſerable; fatigued with purſuing their pleaſures, yet uneaſy without them; growing ſick at laſt of them all, of themſelves, and every thing around them; and compelled perhaps at laſt to have recourſe to ſolitude, without the leaſt proviſion made for it; without any fund of entertainment within, to render it ſupportable. From this wretched ſtate it is that religion would preſerve you; and the very worſt you have to fear from it, is nothing more than ſuch gentle reſtraints on your gayety, as tend to promote the very end you have in view, the true enjoyment even of the preſent life. Suffer it then to do you this kind office; and do not look on Chriſtianity in that gloomy light, in which it ſometimes perhaps appears to you. Far from being an

enemy to chearfulneſs, it is the trueſt friend to it. That ſober and temperate uſe of diverſions which it allows and recommends, is the ſureſt way to preſerve their power to pleaſe, and your capacity to enjoy them. At the ſame time, though it forbids exceſs in our pleaſures, yet it multiplies the number of them; and diſpoſes the mind to receive entertainment from a variety of objects and purſuits, which to the gay part of mankind are abſolutely flat and inſipid. To a body in perfect health the plaineſt food is reliſhing, and to a ſoul rightly harmonized by religion every thing affords delight. Rural retirement, domeſtic tranquillity, friendly converſation, literary purſuits, philoſophical enquiries, works of genius and imagination; nay even the ſilent beauties of unadorned nature, a bright day, a ſtill evening, a ſtarry hemiſphere, are ſources of unadulterated pleaſure to thoſe whoſe taſte is not vitiated by criminal indulgencies, or debaſed by trifling ones. And when from theſe you riſe to the ſtill more rational and manly delights of virtue; to that ſelf-congratulation which ſprings up in the ſoul from the conſciouſneſs of having acted up to the dignity of your nature; of having done your utmoſt to correct your infirmities, to ſubdue your paſſions, to improve your underſtandings, to exalt and purify your affections, to promote the welfare of all within your reach, to love and obey your Maker; then is human happi-

neſs

neſs wound up to its utmoſt pitch; and this world has no higher gratifications to give.

Try then, you, who are in ſearch of pleaſures, try theſe amongſt the reſt; try above all others, the pleaſures of devotion. Think not that they are nothing more than the viſions of a heated imagination. They are real, they are exquiſite. They are what thouſands have experienced, what thouſands ſtill experience, what you yourſelves may experience if you pleaſe. Acquire only a taſte for devotion, (as you often do for other things of far leſs value) in the beginning of life, and it will be your ſupport and comfort through the whole extent of it. It will raiſe you above all low cares, and little gratifications; it will give dignity and ſublimity to your ſentiments, inſpire you with fortitude in danger, with patience in adverſity, with moderation in proſperity, with alacrity in all your undertakings, with watchfulneſs over your own conduct, with benevolence to all mankind. It will be ſo far from throwing a damp on your other pleaſures, that it will give new life and ſpirit to them, and make all nature look gay around you. It will be a freſh fund of chearfulneſs in ſtore for you, when the vivacity of youth begins to droop; and is the only thing that *can* fill up that void in the ſoul which is left in it by every earthly enjoyment. It will not,

like

like worldly pleaſures, deſert you, when you have moſt need of conſolation, in the hours of ſolitude, of ſickneſs, of old age; but when once its holy flame is thoroughly lighted up in your breaſts, inſtead of becoming more faint and languid as you advance in years, it will grow brighter and ſtronger every day; will glow with peculiar warmth and luſtre, when your diſſolution draws near; will diſperſe the gloom and horrors of a death-bed; will give you a foretaſte, and render you worthy to partake, of that FULNESS OF JOY, thoſe pure celeſtial PLEASURES which are at GOD'S RIGHT HAND FOR EVERMORE[t].

[t] Pſal. xvi. 11.

THE END.

THE END.

JOHN iii. 19.

THIS IS THE CONDEMNATION THAT LIGHT IS COME INTO THE WORLD, AND MEN LOVED DARKNESS RATHER THAN LIGHT, BECAUSE THEIR DEEDS WERE EVIL.

WHEN the ſeveral parts of the text are reduced to their proper order; they give us the four following diſtinct propoſitions.

That light is come into the world.

That men have preferred darkneſs to this light.

That the reaſon is becauſe their deeds are evil.

And that the conſequence of this choice will be condemnation.

It may be worth our while to beſtow a little conſideration on each of theſe particulars.

In this enlighten'd age, it will be thought no paradox to aſſert that LIGHT IS COME INTO THE WORLD. The poſition is true in more ſenſes than one; but there is only one that can ſuit this paſſage. The light here meant can be no other than

that divine one of revelation which BROUGHT LIFE AND IMMORTALITY [a] along with it. The Chriſtian diſpenſation is conſtantly and uniformly deſcribed in holy writ under this figure, from the time that the firſt faint glimmerings of it appeared at a diſtance, till it ſhone forth in its full luſtre and glory under the Goſpel. Indeed there ſeems to be ſcarce any other image, that could ſo fitly and adequately repreſent it to us. It is of the ſame uſe to the ſpiritual, that the light of the ſun is to the natural, world. It gives life, health, and vigour, to God's new creation; it maketh the DAY OF SALVATION [b] to dawn upon us; it opens to us the proſpect of another and a better life; IT IS A LIGHT TO OUR FEET AND A LANTERN TO OUR PATHS [c], and guides us in the way to happineſs and glory.

The next aſſertion contained in the text, that MEN HAVE PREFERRED DARKNESS TO THIS LIGHT, may ſeem to require a proof. To LOVE DARKNESS RATHER THAN LIGHT is ſo oppoſite to our nature, ſo inconſiſtent with our general manner of proceeding, that it ſeems at firſt incredible. If it really is the caſe, ſo perverſe a choice was never made but in religion. Every other kind of light men catch at with the utmoſt eagerneſs. The light of the heavens has been ever eſteemed one of the greateſt bleſſings that Providence has beſtowed upon us, without which, even life itſelf would be hardly thought worth

[a] 2 Tim. i. 10. [b] 2 Cor. vi. 2. [c] Pſ. cxix. 105.

poſſeſſing.

poſſeſſing. The love of knowledge, that light of the mind, appears in us as early, and operates in us as ſtrongly, as any one principle in our nature; and in every inſtance, the human underſtanding naturally lays hold on every opportunity of information, and opens itſelf on every ſide to let in all the light it is capable of receiving.

How then comes it to paſs that with a mind thus conſtituted, thus thirſting after light, men can ſometimes bring themſelves to do ſuch violence to their nature, as to chuſe darkneſs, in that very point where it is of the utmoſt importance to have all the light they can poſſibly get; where every ſtep muſt lead to happineſs or miſery, and every error draw after it the moſt fatal and laſting conſequences? Yet our Saviour tells us, that this was actually the caſe in his days, and would God that daily experience did not ſhow the poſſibility of it, in our own! But when we ſee the various artifices with which revelation is every day aſſailed; when we ſee one man[d] moſt ingeniouſly reaſoning us out of every ground of certainty, and every criterion of truth; involving ſelf-evident axioms in obſcurity and confuſion; and entangling our underſtandings in the gloomy intricacies of ſcholaſtic ſubtilty, and metaphyſical abſtraction: when we ſee another[e], who, after having long amuſed and poiſoned all Europe with his writings, and worn out a fine genius in blaſpheming the diſpenſations of the God that gave it, is now be-

[d] Hume. [e] Voltaire.

come

come a hoary veteran in infidelity; and ſtill true to the cauſe, even whilſt he ſtands on the brink of the grave, ſeems anxious to give us the very dregs of his dotage, and to drain out the laſt drop of his venom before he dies; when we ſee a third, with the ſtrongeſt profeſſions of ſincerity and good faith, propoſing moſt humbly what he calls his *doubts* and *ſcruples*, and thereby raiſing them in the minds of others; extolling one part of Chriſtianity, in order to deſtroy the reſt; retaining its moral precepts, but rejecting its evangelical doctrines; giving an air of ſpecioufneſs to the wildeſt ſingularities by the moſt exquiſite graces of compoſition; and inſidiouſly undermining the foundations of the Goſpel, whilſt he pretends to defend it: when I ſay our adverſaries aſſume ſuch different ſhapes, and ſet ſo many engines at work againſt us; what elſe can this mean but to take from us all the ſources of religious information, and bring us back again to the darkneſs and ignorance of our Pagan anceſtors? It is to no purpoſe to tell us here of the *light of nature*. It is an affront to our ſenſes, to offer us that dim taper,

* Rouſſeau.

It were moſt devoutly to be wiſhed, that the ſame incomparable writer who has lately done ſuch eſſential ſervice to the cauſe of religion, by utterly ſubverting Mr. Hume's uncomfortable and unintelligible ſyſtem of phyrrhoniſm, would with the like ſpirit and ſucceſs lay open to the world the endleſs ſophiſms, miſtakes, and miſrepreſentations, of the other two faſhionable infidels. See DR. BEATTIE's *Eſſay on the nature and immutability of Truth*: Where the reader will find good ſenſe and perſpicuity introduced into the abſtruſeſt ſubjects, and a natural, eaſy, ſatisfactory train of reaſoning, enforced by the moſt animated and manly eloquence. What may not the world expect from ſo rare a union of a clear head, a fine imagination, and a heart thoroughly warmed with the love of truth and virtue!

in

in the room of the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS[g]. Whatever men may talk of the modern improvements of ſcience, the diſcoveries of philoſophy, and the ſagacity of human reaſon, it is to Revelation only we are indebted for all the light we boaſt of in religion. If nature could ever have pointed out to us right principles of belief, and rules of conduct, ſhe might have done it long ago; ſhe had 4000 years to do it in before the coming of Chriſt. But what little progreſs was made in this vaſt ſpace of time; what egregious miſtakes were committed, not only in the ſpeculative doctrines of religion, but in ſome of the moſt eſſential points of practical morality, I need not remind you. How comes it then to paſs, that this blind guide is at laſt become ſo quick-ſighted? How comes her eye on a ſudden ſo ſtrong and clear, as to ſee into the perfections and will of God, to penetrate into the dark regions of futurity, to take in at one view the whole compaſs of our duty, and the whole extent of our exiſtence? It is plain ſome friendly hand muſt have removed the film from her eyes; and what other hand could this be than that gracious beneficent one, which gave eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; which helped the impotence, and healed the infirmity, of nature, in every inſtance, in none more than in this? It is in ſhort from the ſacred ſources of the Goſpel, that reaſon drew that light ſhe now enjoys. Let then men walk, if they *will* be ſo perverſe, BY THIS LESSER

[g] Mal. iv. 2.

LIGHT [h], which was only intended TO RULE THE NIGHT [i] of heatheniſm; but let them be ſo honeſt as to confeſs that it is only a *borrowed*, a *reflected* light; that it owes much the greateſt part of its preſent luſtre to that greater, that better light of the Goſpel, whoſe province it is TO GOVERN THE DAY [k], and TO LIGHTEN EVERY MAN THAT COMETH INTO THE WORLD [l].

Let us however ſuppoſe for a moment (what can never be proved) that mankind are now much better able to inveſtigate truth and to find out their duty by themſelves than they were in former ages; and that reaſon can give us (the utmoſt it ever did or can pretend to give) a perfect ſyſtem of morality. But what will this avail us, unleſs it could be ſhown that *man* is alſo perfect and uncorrupt? A religion that contained nothing more than a perfect ſyſtem of morality might perhaps ſuit an Angel; but it is only one part, it is only a ſubordinate part, of the religion of a man and a ſinner. It would be but very poor conſolation to a criminal going to execution, to put into his hands a compleat collection of the laws of his country, when the poor wretch perhaps expected a reprieve. It could ſerve no other purpoſe than to embitter his agonies, and make him ſee more clearly the juſtice of his condemnation. If you choſe to do the unhappy man a real ſervice, and to give him any ſubſtantial comfort, you muſt aſſure him that the offence for which

[h] Gen. i. 16. [i] Ib. [k] Ib. [l] John i. 9.

he

he was going to die was forgiven him; that his ſentence was reverſed; that he would not only be reſtored to his Prince's favour, but put into a way of preſerving it for the future; and that if his conduct afterwards was honeſt and upright, he ſhould be deemed capable of enjoying the higheſt honours in his maſter's kingdom. But no one *could* tell him this, or at leaſt he would credit no one that did; except he was commiſſioned and authorized by the Prince himſelf, to tell him ſo. He might ſtudy the laws in his hands till the very moment of his execution, without ever finding out from them that he ſhould obtain a pardon.

Such preciſely was the ſtate of man before Chriſt came into the world. He had fallen from his original innocence. He was a rebel againſt God, and obnoxious to his wrath. The ſentence of death had paſſed upon him, and he had no plea to offer to arreſt the execution of it. Reaſon, you ſay, gives him a perfect rule to walk by. But he has already tranſgreſs'd this rule; and if even this tranſgreſſion were cancell'd, yet if left to himſelf, he may tranſgreſs it again the next moment. He is uneaſy under his ſentence, he wants forgiveneſs for the paſt, aſſiſtance for the future; and till you can give him this, it is an inſult upon his miſery to talk to him of a perfect rule of action. If this be all that reaſon can give him (and it is really much more than it can give him) he muſt neceſſarily have recourſe to Revelation. God only knows,

and God only can tell, whether he *will* forgive, and upon what *terms* he will forgive the offences done againſt him; what mode of worſhip he requires; what helps he will afford us; and what condition he will place us in hereafter. All this God actually has told us in the Goſpel. It was to tell us this, He ſent his ſon into the world, whoſe miſſion was confirmed by the higheſt authority, by ſigns from Heaven, and miracles on earth; whoſe life and doctrine are delivered down to us by the moſt unexceptionable witneſſes, who ſealed their teſtimony with their blood; who were too curious and incredulous to be themſelves impoſed upon, too honeſt and ſincere, too plain and artleſs, to impoſe upon others.

What then can be the reaſon that men ſtill refuſe to ſee, and perſiſt in LOVING DARKNESS RATHER THAN LIGHT? They will tell you perhaps that it is becauſe the Goſpel is full of incredible myſteries, but our Saviour tells you, and he tells you much truer, that it is BECAUSE THEIR DEEDS ARE EVIL. The myſteries and difficulties of the Goſpel can be no real objection to any man that conſiders what myſteries occur, and what inſuperable objections may be ſtarted in almoſt every branch of human knowledge; and how often we are obliged in our moſt important temporal concerns to decide and to act upon evidence, encumbered with far greater difficulties than any that

are

are to be found in Scripture. If we can admit no religion that is not free from myſtery, we muſt, I doubt, be content without any religion at all. Even the religion of nature itſelf, the whole conſtitution both of the natural and the moral world, is full of myſtery[m]; and the greateſt myſtery of all would be, if, with ſo many irreſiſtible marks of truth, Chriſtianity ſhould at laſt prove falſe. It is not then becauſe the Goſpel has *too little* light for theſe men that they reject it, but becauſe it has *too much*. FOR EVERY ONE THAT DOTH EVIL HATETH THE LIGHT, NEITHER COMETH TO THE LIGHT, LEST HIS DEEDS SHOULD BE REPROVED[n]. The light of the Goſpel is too prying and inquiſitive for ſuch an one. It reveals certain things which he could wiſh to conceal from all the world, and if poſſible from himſelf. Nor is this all, it not only reveals, but it reproves, them. Its purity and brightneſs are a tacit reproach to the impurity of his heart, and the uncleanneſs of his hands. It ſtrikes him with an evidence he cannot bear; an evidence not only of its own truth, but of his guilt and baſeneſs. He ſees his own frightful reſemblance ſo ſtrongly reflected from the mirror that is held up to him, that he ſtarts from it with horror, and ſhelters himſelf in darkneſs. The Goſpel does indeed offend him; but it is not his underſtanding, it is his

[m] Vide *Voltaire. Queſtions ſur l'Encyclopedie.* V. i. p. 190. *Rouſſeau. T.* 7. *p.* 176. & *T.* 8. *p.* 17, 26, 32, 49.—12° 1762. *Francfort.*

[n] John iii. 20.

conſcience, that is ſhocked; he could eaſily credit what it requires him to believe; but he cannot, or rather he will not, practiſe what it commands him to do.

It is plain that ſuch a man cannot poſſibly admit a Revelation that condemns him; and it is *as* plain that the man of virtue cannot ſpurn the hand that is graciouſly ſtretched out to reward him. If he is a *truly* virtuous man, that is one who ſincerely labours to know his duty, and ſincerely intends to perform it, he cannot but wiſh for more light to guide him in the inveſtigation, more aſſiſtance to ſupport him in the diſcharge of it, more happineſs to crown his perſeverance in it, than bare reaſon alone can afford him. This is what all the beſt and wiſeſt Heathens moſt ardently deſired, what nature has been continually looking out for with the utmoſt earneſtneſs of expectation. When with a mind thus diſpoſed he ſits down to examine the Goſpel, ſuggeſt to me the leaſt ſhadow of a reaſon why he ſhould reject it. He finds in it a religion, pure, holy, and benevolent, as the God that gave it. He finds not only its moral precepts, but even its ſublimeſt myſteries, calculated to promote internal ſanctity, vital piety, univerſal philanthropy. He finds it throughout ſo great and noble, ſo congenial to the fineſt feelings, and moſt generous ſentiments of his ſoul; that he cannot but *wiſh* it may be true; and never yet, I believe, did any good man wiſh it to be true, but he actually

found it ſo. He ſees in it every expectation of nature anſwered, every infirmity ſupported, every want ſupplied, every terror diſſipated, every hope confirmed; nay he ſees that God has done exceeding abundantly above all that he could either aſk or think; that he has given him, (what reaſon could not even have the idea of,) eternal happineſs in a life to come. Will this man LOVE DARKNESS RATHER THAN THAT LIGHT? Will he chuſe to purſue virtue, with much pains, little ſucceſs, and no other WAGES than DEATH; or to be led to her through a ſafe and eaſy path by an infallible guide, who does not deſire him to SERVE GOD FOR NOUGHT?

Let me not however be underſtood to aſſert, or to repreſent the text as aſſerting, that *all* unbelievers are without exception abſolutely bad men. There are ſome no doubt who lead, what is called, good moral lives. Yet if you examine even theſe very ſtrictly, you will, I am perſuaded, ſeldom find that their virtue is ſo pure, ſo uniform, ſo extenſive, ſo compleat in all the ſeveral branches of duty, as that of a truly devout Chriſtian. And obſerve too, that men may reject the Goſpel, not only becauſe they are diſſolute in their conduct, but for various other reaſons: becauſe, perhaps they are too buſy or too idle to examine carefully into the truth; becauſe like GALLIO THEY CARE FOR NONE OF THESE THINGS, and like him, DRIVE THEM AWAY with contempt FROM THE JUDGEMENT-

SEAT

SEAT[o] of their own mind; because they give themselves up to a warm lively imagination; and are impatient to show that they have more depth of thought, more freedom of spirit, and elevation of mind, than the rest of the world; because in fine they are ambitious to figure at the head of a sect, to enjoy the delightful triumph of beating down long-established opinions, and erecting upon their ruins a little favourite system of their own. Now all these causes of infidelity, though less culpable than downright profligacy, are yet evidently great faults, and indicate more or less a depraved turn of mind; and from immoralities of *this* kind at least scarce any sceptics are entirely free. Or admit, that some are; yet these instances are confessedly very rare; and a prudent man would no more chuse to embark his morality on so precarious a bottom, than he would venture to walk in the dark amidst rocks and precipices, because some perhaps have done it without receiving any harm. In general therefore, the ground of unbelief laid down by our Saviour in the text, is undoubtedly a true one; and if a man shuns the light it is a certain sign that his deeds are, in some sense or other, in a greater or a less degree, evil, and consequently his condemnation just.

Yet how can this be, you will perhaps say? Can God punish his creatures for walking by that light which he himself has set

[o] Acts xviii. 16.

up

up in their own minds, though he has at the ſame time perhaps revealed a fuller light from Heaven[p]? Moſt certainly he can; for the very ſame reaſon that a Prince might puniſh his ſubjects for acting by the law of nature; inſtead of governing themſelves by the civil laws of the land. It is not a matter of indifference, whether you embrace Chriſtianity or not. Though reaſon could anſwer all the purpoſes of Revelation (as in truth it can anſwer none) yet you are not at liberty to make it your ſole guide if there be ſuch a thing as a true Revelation. We are the ſubjects of the Almighty; and whether we will acknowledge it or not, we live, and cannot *but* live, under his government. His will is the law of his kingdom. If he has made no expreſs declaration of his will, we muſt collect it as well as we can from what we know of his nature and our own. But if he has expreſsly declared his will, *that* is the law we are to be governed by. We may indeed refuſe to be governed by it; but it is at our peril if we do; for if it proves to be a *true* declaration of his will, to reject it is REBELLION.

But to reject or receive it, you may alledge, is not a thing in your own power. Belief depends not on your will but your underſtanding. And will the righteous judge of the earth condemn

[p] De quoi puis-je être coupable en ſervant Dieu ſelon les Lumieres qu'il donne à mon eſprit, & ſelon les ſentimens qu'il inſpire à mon cœur? *Rouſſeau*, T. 8. *p.* 67.

you for want of understanding[9]? No; but he may and will condemn you for the *wrong conduct* of your understanding. It is not indeed in your power to believe whatever you please, whether credible or incredible; but it *is* in your power to consider thoroughly, whether a supposed incredibility be real or only apparent. It *is* in your power to bestow a greater or less degree of attention on the evidence before you. It *is* in your power to examine it with an earnest desire to find out the truth, and a firm resolution to embrace it wherever you do find it; or on the contrary, to bring with you a heart full of incorrigible depravity or invincible prepossessions. Have you then truly and honestly done every thing that is confessedly in your power, towards forming a right judgement of Revelation? Have you ever laid before yourself in one view the whole collective evidence of Christianity: the amazing consistence, harmony, and connection, of all its various parts; the long chain of prophecies undeniably compleated in it; the astonishing and well-attested miracles that attended it; the perfect sanctity of its author; the purity of its precepts; the sublimity of its doctrines; the amazing rapidity of its progress; the illustrious company of confessors, saints, and martyrs, who died to confirm its truth: together with an infinite number of collateral proofs and subordinate circumstances, all concurring to

[9] Est on maître de croire, ou de ne pas croire? Est ce un crime de n'avoir pas su bien argumenter? *Rousseau*, T. 6. p. 305.

form

form ſuch a body of evidence, as no other truth in the world can ſhew; ſuch as muſt neceſſarily bear down by its own weight and magnitude, all trivial objections to particular parts? Surely theſe things are not trifles; ſurely they at leaſt demand ſerioufneſs and attention. Have you then done the Goſpel this common piece of juſtice? Have you ever ſat down to conſider it with impartiality and candour; without any favourite vice or early prejudice, without any fondneſs for applauſe, or novelty, or refinement, to miſlead you? Have you examined it with the ſame care and diligence, that you would examine a title to an eſtate? Have you enquired for proper books? Have you read the defences of Revelation as well as the attacks upon it? Have you in difficult points applied for the opinion of wiſe and learned friends; juſt as you would conſult the ableſt lawyers when your property was concerned, or the moſt ſkilful phyſicians when your life was at ſtake? If you can truly ſay, that you have done all theſe things; if you have faithfully beſtowed on theſe enquiries, all the leiſure and abilities you are maſter of, and called in every help within your reach, there is little danger of any material doubts remaining upon your mind. But if after all there ſhould—Be not afraid —Truſt in God and BE AT PEACE. You are in the hands of a gracious Maſter, who will not require more of you than you are able to perform. To the modeſt, the humble, the diligent, the virtuous enquirer; who labours after conviction,

but cannot thoroughly arrive at it; who never attempts or wishes to infuse his scruples into others; who earnestly strives, who fervently prays, for more light and strength; crying out with all the passionate sincerity of an honest heart, LORD, I BELIEVE, HELP THOU MINE UNBELIEF[1]; to him every equitable allowance will undoubtedly be made, every instance of compassionate tenderness be shown. FOR LIKE AS A FATHER PITIETH HIS OWN CHILDREN, EVEN SO IS THE LORD MERCIFUL TO THEM THAT FEAR HIM[2]. But to them who neither *fear* nor *regard* him—To the bold unbelieving libertine, who is against the Gospel, because the Gospel is against him; to the man of pride and paradox, who burns to distinguish himself from the vulgar by the novelty of his opinions, and would disdain to follow the common herd of mankind, even though he knew they were leading him to Heaven; to the subtle minute philosopher who fairly refines away every dictate of common sense, and is lost in the dark profound of his own wretched sophistry; to the buffoon who laughs and takes pains to make all the world laugh at every thing serious and sacred; to the indolent, negligent, superficial, free-thinker, who reads a little, takes for granted a great deal, and understands nothing thoroughly; to the man of pleasure and amusement, who treats all these things with a giddy, wanton, contemptuous, levity; and thinks that the

[1] Mark ix. 24. [2] Ps. ciii. 13.

whole

whole fabric of Revelation may be overturned, by a filly cavil, or a profane jeſt, thrown out in the gay moments of convivial mirth. To theſe I ſay, and all like theſe, the Almighty will one day moſt juſtly ſhew, that his gracious offers of Salvation are not to be deſpiſed, and trampled upon, and ridiculed with impunity.

Conſider then, you, who reject the Goſpel (if any ſuch be here) conſider I entreat you, on what grounds you reject it; and think a little ſeriouſly on theſe things once more in your lives, before you reſolve never to think again. Aſk your own hearts whether you are *really*, what perhaps you profeſs to be, unbelievers on conviction, or whether you have taken up your infidelity, as ſome do their faith, upon truſt. It becomes not us to judge you uncharitably; but indeed it becomes you to examine yourſelves very ſtrictly. You may eaſily deceive the world; you may, if you pleaſe, deceive yourſelves; but God you cannot deceive. He, to whom all hearts are open as the day, he knows whether you are conſcientious and honeſt doubters, or careleſs, prejudiced, profane deſpiſers, of his word. IT IS A SMALL THING FOR YOU TO BE JUDGED OF MAN'S JUDGEMENT; HE THAT JUDGETH YOU IS THE LORD [t]; and by the unerring rules of his juſtice you muſt finally ſtand or fall. Think then

[t] 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

whether

whether you can face that justice without dismay; whether you can boldly plead before the tribunal of Christ the sincerity of your unbelief as a bar to your condemnation. That plea may possibly in *some* cases be a good one. God grant it may in yours! But remember this one thing, on that you stake your own souls upon the truth of it.

THE END.

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